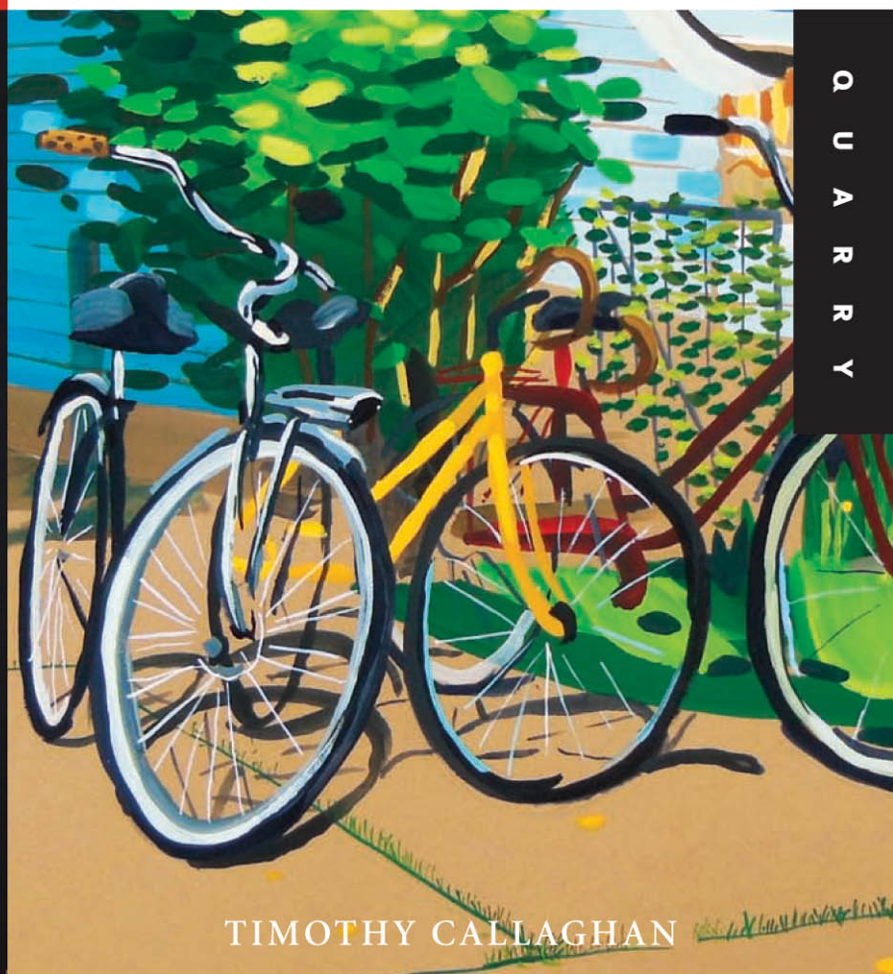
ONE PAINTING A DAY

A 6-WEEK COURSE IN OBSERVATIONAL PAINTING: CREATING EXTRAORDINARY PAINTINGS FROM EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES



QUARRY

TIMOTHY CALLAGHAN

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Old Maker

North Shore Carpet Beaters Union

CONTENTS

	Introduction	8
Chapter 1:	Getting Started	11
	PART I: STILL LIFE: THING	18
Chapter 2:	Still Life as Laboratory	21
Chapter 3:	Objects as Narrative	37
	PART II: LANDSCAPE: PLACE	52
Chapter 4:	Private Spaces	55
Chapter 5:	Public Places	71
	PART III: PORTRAITURE: PERSON	86
Chapter 6:	Intimate Traditions	89
Chapter 7:	New Directions	105
Chapter 8:	Contributors	121
	About the Author	128
	Acknowledgments	128

INTRODUCTION

Necking, gouache

The secret to success in any creative field is a dedicated work ethic. Commitment to your practice is more important than any "natural ability" or "God-given talent." The craft of painting is no different; it requires the practitioner's love of the process and willingness to do it every day, even if it's only for a few hours.

No single book or particular instructor can teach you to paint. As artists, we teach ourselves through trial and error and repetition. While teachers and books are excellent resources, they are simply tour guides for the journey.

This book is such a guide, intended to inspire you to look around your local environment and respond to your daily experiences through the craft of painting.

Paintings describe the sensation of looking at something. They also describe how long it takes to look at something before you can actually see it. They are a visual conversation between you, the artist, and your viewer, describing your experiences and the things you look at on a daily basis. Painting is a poetic and ethereal language that allows for a nonlinear type of storytelling.

In representational painting, an artwork can fall into three major genres or categories: still life, landscape, and portraiture. Objects, space, and the figure (like nouns; things, place, and person) are the cornerstones of good storytelling. In this book we look at these three major formats, both independently and how they overlap to create paintings that tell our stories.

One Painting a Day is a commitment to a philosophy with rewards that can be seen every day. Each painting is a response to the last painting the artist made, an effort to make it better.

By taking this challenge of creating one painting a day, you have already succeeded. By the time you finish the forty-two paintings, your progress will be overwhelmingly gratifying.

The process of painting is typically thought of as lengthy, built up in successive layers. In many cases this is true, but there is an approach that is more immediate and akin to the spontaneity of a medium like drawing. This book is in part inspired by that approach: By working on a smaller scale and with quick-drying paints like acrylic and gouache, you can make one painting a day.

This book is also inspired by the first book in this series, Veronica Lawlor's *One Drawing a Day*. Within a six-week structure, Lawlor encourages her readers to build good studio habits and make a work every day without judging the results.

Working in the studio making paintings can be a very solitary practice, which is why having a community element to your studio habits can be very beneficial. Community has always been an integral part of my studio practice; I continue to include friends whose work I respond to into that process. We've exhibited together, share our progress, and talk about painting. Communication and collaboration becomes increasingly challenging once we leave the formal environment of school and our lives get busier, but technology and the Internet still make it possible.

For this book I've invited six painters—people whose work I've loved and known for a long time—to join me on this "one painting a day" journey. Even though we are spread all over the country, we still talk about painting and continue to share our progress with one another. This is something you can do too. As you embark on this journey, invite fellow artists to take the challenge and share your progress.

The six-week course of forty-two exercises focuses on the major formats of representational painting, using both pure observation and photography as a reference.

Using the first week's worth of exercises as a springboard or course primer, we will look at all of the seven elements of art in relation to painting. Then, in Week 2, we begin to introduce narrative as a way to generate content and look for objects that inspire invention.

Weeks 3 and 4 are devoted to investigating space in our local landscape and discovering how the places we see every day can encourage inspired paintings.

The final two weeks of exercises are about the human element. We introduce portraiture and the figure to interact with the objects and space we have created.

This may seem overwhelming at first. Admittedly, when I began my own one-painting-a-day journey, at times it seemed impossible. Getting into the studio was the last thing I wanted to do.

Don't get discouraged if you have a bad day in the studio; it's part of the process. If you miss a day or don't finish a painting in the time allotted, simply double your efforts the next day. Most importantly, remember that by simply trying to make one thing a day, you have already succeeded.

CHAPTER 1:

GETTING STARTED

MATERIALS

The most important thing to remember regarding painting materials is that you get what you pay for. The cheapest brush or tube of paint may not always be the best way to go. Inexpensive paints aren't made from rich pigments, and therefore are very transparent and have deceiving colors. A poorly constructed brush will break down after a few washings and begin to shed. You will quickly find that having to replace your brushes frequently is not only annoying, but also inefficient: By the time you have replaced a lower-quality brush for the third time, you will have spent as much money as you would have if you had purchased the higher-quality brush to begin with. Certainly that doesn't mean you have to get the most expensive brush; there are many good options priced right in the middle. Experiment with different brands and price ranges.

Because painting supplies are so expensive, I follow a particular hierarchy in terms of how I buy them. Quality of paint is most important to me, so I spend the most amount of money on richly pigmented paints. Good brushes are important, but not as important as good paint, and so I spend significantly less money on them. Grounds aren't really an issue here because I make my own canvas or work on paper—even if it's really nice paper, it isn't very expensive.

If you choose to work on premade canvases, many options are moderately priced and of good quality. Most of the other materials you need you can find lying around the house, in your recycling bin, or at a hardware store for significantly less than you would find them in an art supply store.

PAINT

For the exercises in this book, I highly recommend using a water-based paint like acrylic or gouache, which is like a hybrid between watercolor and acrylic paint. For smaller works on paper and the paintings in this book, I used an acrylic-based gouache, which is very versatile and works great for quick paintings. Gouache's best quality is its opacity and flat saturated color. The downside of gouache is that it is impermanent; if you try to layer paint on top of paint that has already dried, the fresh paint will mix with the dry and make your colors muddy.

Acrylic paint is also opaque and dries very quickly, but it's permanent, so you can layer the paint. What I don't like, though, is its glossy look when it dries. You can add a matte medium to an acrylic paint to reduce the gloss, but this sometimes reduces the saturation of the color. An acrylic-based gouache combines the best of these two paints, so you get a permanent, opaque paint that is very rich in color and dries flat.

BRUSHES

You will need a wide range of brushes, varying in size and shape. The best affordable brushes that will last are made of synthetic hog's hair. You can use them for both acrylic and oil paints. In addition, I would get a few watercolor brushes; they are softer and are great for working with thin transparent washes.

GROUNDS

I prefer to paint on paper; a good, sturdy piece of watercolor paper like an Arches or Stonehenge is great for the exercises in this book. The advantage of paper is that you can easily crop it down to any size or shape you like. If you prefer to work on premade canvas, you can usually find them in assorted sizes. You should get as many different shapes and sizes as you can find. Another option is to work on a sturdy piece of cardboard or thin piece of wood that you can prepare with a coat of gesso. The advantages of these grounds are that you can cut them down to any size and they are extremely affordable—in a lot of cases, they're free!

PALETTES, JARS, AND RAGS

You can find these items in any art supply store. Palettes come in a variety of sizes and are made from varying materials. The disposable palettes that come in a book are very convenient and make for easy cleanup, especially if you're traveling with your art supplies to paint on location. The type of palette I use depends on the circumstance. The bare essential for a palette is a neutral surface that will not absorb paint. You can simply attach a piece of gray or white paper to the back of an old windowpane. When searching for jars to hold water to clean your brushes, look for ones that have the widest mouth to accommodate many brushes. It's also a good idea to have a few; one for washing and one that stays relatively clean to thin the paint. You will also need a good supply of rags; you can buy shop rags at any hardware store or use old t-shirts and rip them into small pieces.

SKETCHBOOK, PENCILS, AND CAMERA

I prefer a smaller sketchbook that I can easily transport and always have in my back pocket. The leather sketchbooks that are bound, like Moleskine, are nice because they are very durable and the pages don't easily tear out. It's also a good idea to have a few pencils for drawing in the sketchbook as well as doing preparatory drawing on your paintings. I prefer very light graphite pencils when drawing directly on the surface that I plan to paint on. A point-and-shoot digital camera is also essential, not only so that you can take reference photographs for paintings, but also so that you can photograph your paintings and share your progress.

OTHER HELPFUL TOOLS

I prefer to paint directly on the wall or on a table, but sometimes I need to use an easel. For the exercises in this book, a portable easel might be a good investment, but it isn't required. You can create makeshift easels from chairs and even ladders; a drawing board also can function as an easel. In addition, a tackle box is a good idea for when you have to travel with all your materials. Essential items to carry in your tackle box along with your painting materials are masking tape and a small drop cloth. A personal computer is another helpful tool for this journey, but it isn't required. It can come in handy if you want to print your own reference photos quickly and affordably. You may also consider using some social media element with this project and start a simple blog page to document and easily share your progress with your community.

STUDIO AND LOCATION

Studios come in all shapes and sizes. Having a studio outside your home is a luxury but certainly not a requirement for the exercises in this book. I have worked in all types of studios throughout my career, from large warehouse spaces to garages—even a small corner in the basement. A separate room in your home can be ideal because you can leave your work and supplies set up permanently and come back to them whenever you have time. Or, a studio can simply be a table in your home, with some wall space adjacent to it so that you can pin up in-progress works.

Whatever space you choose to work in, you want to make it inspirational and comfortable, a place you feel like going to every day to make paintings. Whenever I

move into a new space, I like to pin up postcards and pictures of paintings that I admire. I also like to designate a place for all my favorite artist books and a comfy chair to sit in while looking through those books when I need a break or feel stuck when I'm working on a painting. Music is also very important when I work, so a stereo is a must for me in the studio. Plants are great to have in a studio space too: They are forms to paint and include in still lifes, and they add to the atmosphere of your space by providing inspirational color.

TABLES AND EASELS

To furnish your studio, you may want a drafting-style table that tilts and is specifically designed for making art. In my studio, I have a large, sturdy folding table so that if I want to work on a larger scale and need more space, I can easily fold it up and move it out of the way. It's also a good idea to have a few smaller tables, preferably with wheels, but you could instead use fold-up TV trays or something similar. Easels also come in different shapes and sizes and vary in price. I don't have an easel in my studio; when I want to paint upright I prop the painting on the wall with cinder block. If you choose to purchase an easel, look for one that is collapsible and easily portable for working on location.

STORAGE

Somewhere in your workspace, you will need to designate a place for storing finished and in-progress works as well as your art supplies. A small shelving structure for holding materials will work well; you can usually find one at any hardware store. You should also designate a space to store your work safely. If you're working on paper, a flat file is a great shelving system to sort and stack paintings. Another option is to store your work in a few large, flat portfolios.

LIGHTING

Good lighting is one of the most important elements in the studio. A space with one or two windows that receive a lot of daylight is ideal. In addition, you will also need clamp lights for working late into the evening and lighting your subjects. The clamp lights that you can find at any hardware store are the best because they can be moved around the studio easily as needed throughout the day. It's a good idea to get a few different bulbs to use in the clamp lights. Get both fluorescent and daylight bulbs so that you can balance warm and cool light.

SEATING

A comfortable chair is a must in the studio when you're working at a table; a chair whose height you can adjust will be very useful. In addition, a chair that has wheels is a good idea so that you can push yourself back from your painting periodically to look at your work from a distance. A tall stool is another piece of furniture you might want to consider when you're working on an easel or directly on the wall. Whatever type of seating you choose, it's important to also stand once in a while when you paint. That way, you can look at the work from different distances and see the painting as it is developing.

WORKING ON LOCATION

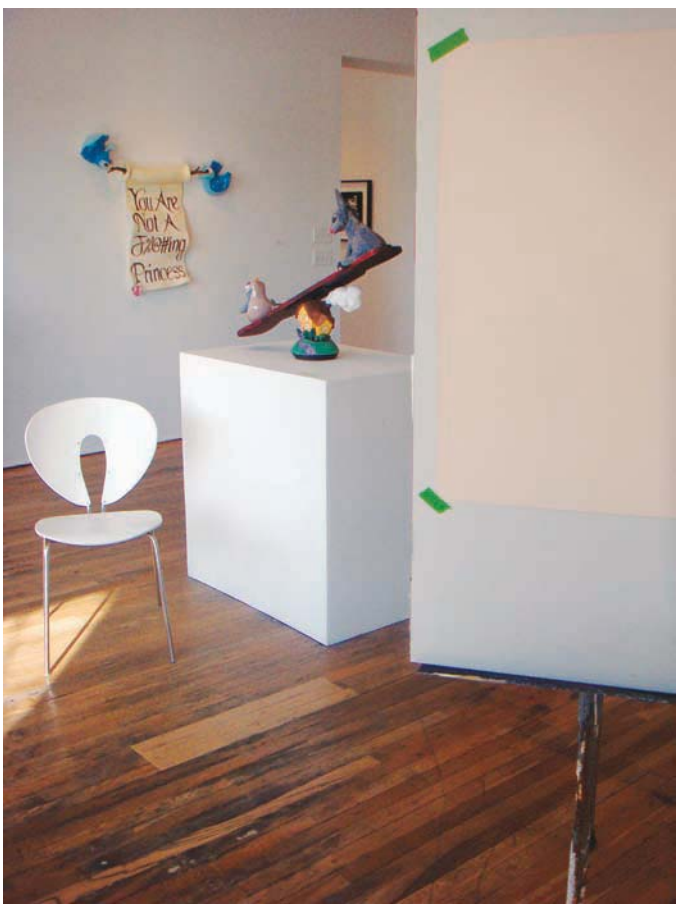
When you're working outside your studio on location, you'll want to be as efficient as possible and travel light. Use a tackle box or toolbox to create a movable studio filled with all the supplies you will need to make a painting away from your studio. Whenever I travel to someone's home to make a portrait or work outside to paint a landscape, I have a separate kit that I can travel with.

In addition to paint and brushes, you want to fill your kit with these items:

1. Jars with tight-fitting lids filled with water for cleaning your brushes and thinning your paint. Two jars should be sufficient.
2. A small drop cloth that you can fold up if you're painting in someone's home, as well as plenty of rags.
3. A roll of masking tape. This can come in handy for taping a piece of paper to a drawing board to paint on, or if you want to mask off an area in your painting.
4. Your sketchbook and pencils for doing thumbnail sketches and preparatory drawings.
5. Your camera for taking reference photographs in case you don't finish the painting on location.
6. A disposable pad of palette paper. This is very convenient for painting on location and small enough to easily transport.
7. A few plastic bags. You can put dirty brushes and rags in them, so once you have finished you can pack up without making a mess in your travel kit.

If you choose to purchase a portable easel, look for one that folds into a box; it will give you additional storage for painting supplies. You can also use a folding chair and a drawing board to function as a makeshift easel/workspace.

Finally, a portfolio case with a shoulder strap for carrying your work is a helpful tool, one that allows for more storage of miscellaneous items that may not fit in your tackle box.



On location

PART I: STILL LIFE: THING

"It's the very process of looking at something that makes it beautiful."

—David Hockney

Pitch-In, acrylic and resin, by Amy Kligman

FOUND STILL LIFE

DAY 10

Often while riding my bike or taking a walk, I like to make up stories about discarded or awkwardly arranged objects I find during the journey. Recently, while on my way to the studio, I came upon a cat investigating a milk crate in a vacant lot. Unfortunately, I didn't have my sketchbook or camera with me, so a lot of this painting is re-created from memory. Much of the narrative of this painting wasn't so much from the scene I witnessed as it was from a response to Matthew's painting *Note,* in which he is responding to a found note. With the help of a milk crate in my studio and photographs of my own cat, I was able to reconstruct this funny little moment that documents my memory and responds to the narrative of Matthew's painting.

EXERCISE 10

Take a walk through your neighborhood with a sketchbook and a camera, and look for objects that were left behind. When you come across something that strikes you as peculiar, accidental, or maybe funny, photograph it or do a quick sketch of the scene. Then make up a story from the picture and make a painting that suggests the who, what, or why in this found still life.

TIP

Include a detail about location or context that emphasizes the "found" nature of the objects. In my painting, the narrative of the missing cat is created through the empty space that surrounds the milk crate. The detail of the fence with vines suggests the displacement of the object's surroundings.

Cat in the Box, gouache

Note, watercolor, by Matthew Johnson

STORAGE STILL LIFE

DAY 11

Storage spaces, like a closet, drawer, or garage, can be interesting subjects for a still life. These places are packed with objects that are not arranged in any particular stylistic manner, yet hold much potential for suggesting narrative. It is fascinating to observe how and why we organize our belongings and what this can reveal about our character, personality, or mood. Visually, these spaces hold many possibilities for nontraditional still-life compositions that flatten the space and isolate the object's qualities.

For this painting, I was looking into a closet that was nearly empty and wanted to emphasize the sparse features of the objects and their relationships to one another.

EXERCISE 11

Look for a storage space in your home that has a mood or quality that particularly reflects your personality. Make a painting from it.

TIP

Before starting this painting, it may be helpful to do a few quick thumbnail sketches focusing on the painting's composition. Look for repetitive motifs that suggest pattern. To achieve a more compact composition, zoom in on your subject and crop any information that refers to the room where the storage space is located.

VARIATION

An interesting variation on this theme is to completely invent a storagelike structure and the objects in it. In Harris's painting, he presents us with an image of a makeshift shelf where the objects are self-referential to his artistic influences and sense of humor.

Bookcase with Pocket Knife, acrylic, by Harris Johnson

Yours, Mine, and Ours, gouache

PORTRAIT STILL LIFE

DAY 12

Using someone else's objects can be an interesting way to approach a still life, almost like an exercise in portraiture; you can arrange the belongings in a manner that describes an event or your impression of this person. Objects like clothing, chairs, shoes, or hats have qualities that refer to the body and possess sentiment and character that may suggest the attributes of a particular person.

For this painting, I was looking at shoes casually descending a staircase. Whenever my partner and I go out for the evening, the ritual of choosing the right shoes to go with her dress is always a topic of conversation. I didn't do much in terms of arranging the shoes, but simply added a few more pairs and shifted them to imply movement up or down the staircase. My intent was to suggest the decision-making process that comes with getting dressed up to go out for the evening.

Detail

Up the Stairs, gouache and ink

EXERCISE 12

You can borrow these objects from someone close to you or simply respond to an arrangement of someone's belongings in your home or workspace.

VARIATION

An interesting variation on this exercise is to let someone else pick the objects for you. In Libby's painting, she is responding to her son's hand-painted cup and the dandelions he arranged in the cup. The painting, while expertly depicted, has a child-like feel to it. You begin to imagine who the child is or what he may look like.

Jasper's Cup, oil, by Libby Black

KENNY ROGERS & THE FIRST EDITION · GREATEST HITS

ANTHOLOGY STILL LIFE

DAY 13

The things we collect tell a story about our lives. You can tell a lot about a person through the things he or she accumulates and displays, be they records, books, or movies. A record or book collection reveals a narrative of the person's influence and taste.

Music has always been an important part of my life and my studio practice. For this painting, I wanted to create a still life that could read as an anthology of influence in chronological order. I chose to work on a black ground to highlight the minimal details in text and color of the records' spines so that the viewer would literally read the painting from left to right.

EXERCISE 13

Choose an anthology or collection of things in your home to arrange into a still life, and then make a painting from it. It doesn't necessarily have to be books or records. It could simply be the dry goods in your pantry or the souvenir magnets on your refrigerator.

VARIATION

Another way to approach this theme is to use someone else's collection of objects. In Amy's painting *Cheap Date*, she was responding to her parents' collection of Harlequin Romance novels, focusing on the individual titles on the spines of the books.

Teach Me to Dance, gouache

Cheap Date, acrylic and resin, by Amy Kligman

SUNDAY PLAIN DEALER

SUNDAY STILL LIFE

DAY 14

Sunday morning is one of my most enjoyable times of the week and an excellent subject for a still life. The challenge of suggesting a particular day and even time of day through still life can be inspiring in both universal and specific imagery. For this painting, I wanted to focus on my morning routine of reading the paper with coffee and cigarettes in the early morning light. I chose a topographical composition to suggest the particular vantage point of sitting and slowly waking.

EXERCISE 14

Choose a few objects that best represent your perfect routine on Sunday morning (or whatever day represents your most sacred moments of reflection). Arrange the objects to suggest the activity and place for this ritual.

VARIATION

A still life doesn't have to be still. For instance, Harris's painting of the interior of his car has a lot of activity and suggestion of movement. The ritual of driving to the studio while reflecting on last evening's work or anticipating a new idea can be an interesting variation on this theme.

Preseason, gouache

Car with Moth, acrylic, by Harris Johnson

PART II: LANDSCAPE: PLACE

"I was never one to paint space, I paint air."
—Fairfield Porter

Plantscape, oil, by Cecelia Phillips

Test Pattern, acrylic and resin, by Amy Kligman

CHAPTER 4

PRIVATE SPACES

Painting a landscape is essentially about representing space and the places that surround us. Landscapes are generally associated with sublime pastoral scenes, but as our landscape has dramatically changed over the past century, so have our ideas of what a painting about space can be.

The structure of foreground, middle ground, and background can be applied to almost any space. For instance, an interior space like your living room or studio can be a painting about space. As a painter, I use my local landscape as a subject to explore space and make paintings that are about the specific places I encounter every day. Therefore, I don't necessarily have to travel to the countryside to make beautiful paintings. I can simply sit in the backyard or take a walk through the neighborhood and respond to the places in my immediate environment. This next week's worth of exercises is devoted to using your home and neighborhood as inspiration to create paintings based on both the interior and exterior places you see every day.

HOME LANDSCAPE

DAY 15

I have always been interested in painting space, and I've always painted pictures of the places where I have lived. I grew up in a rural environment; now that I live in an urban setting, my interest in space has not changed, but my paintings have.

Painting your home feels a lot like painting a self-portrait; there is a particular pride, or even vanity, that affects the decision-making and editing process. There is a very emotional response to that process of returning or leaving home. The first or last thing you see is the same every day, but your memory of it is constantly changing. For this painting, my intent was to paint the front of my home and suggest the beginning or end of this journey.

EXERCISE 15

Make a painting of the exterior of your home, whether it's where you currently live or perhaps your childhood home. Look for unique details and qualities of the space around your home to include in the painting. For example, in my painting I was interested in capturing the compressed nature of my neighborhood, so there isn't much open or negative space in the painting.

TIP

When working within a traditional landscape format with a distinct foreground, middle ground, and background, it's helpful to paint the background first and then work up to the foreground. Since painting is a medium that favors layers, this will help create a deeper space no matter how realistically you render the space.

The Skeleton Crew, gouache

UTOPIAN LANDSCAPE

DAY 16

The backyard is a place of refuge and a great subject for a landscape; in the warmer months, it is the first place I retreat to after a long day of work. The backyard is also a space where a lot of activity happens—and unlike the front yard, the backyard is less formal. I spend a lot of time in my backyard sitting, reading, looking, and drawing; at times it feels like a second studio. For this painting, I wanted to document a moment between activities that suggests pause. The rugs drying on the line while the light rakes across the grass implies that silent reflection.

EXERCISE 16

Find a space in your backyard (or other exterior space that's like a little retreat for you) and make a painting from it. Focus on a particular time of day and its light quality to add to the mood of the space.

Backyard, oil, by Matthew Johnson

VARIATION

The size of your backyard doesn't matter. It could simply be the fire escape of an apartment or another transitional space from interior to exterior. Matthew painted a very intimate space behind his apartment in New York City.

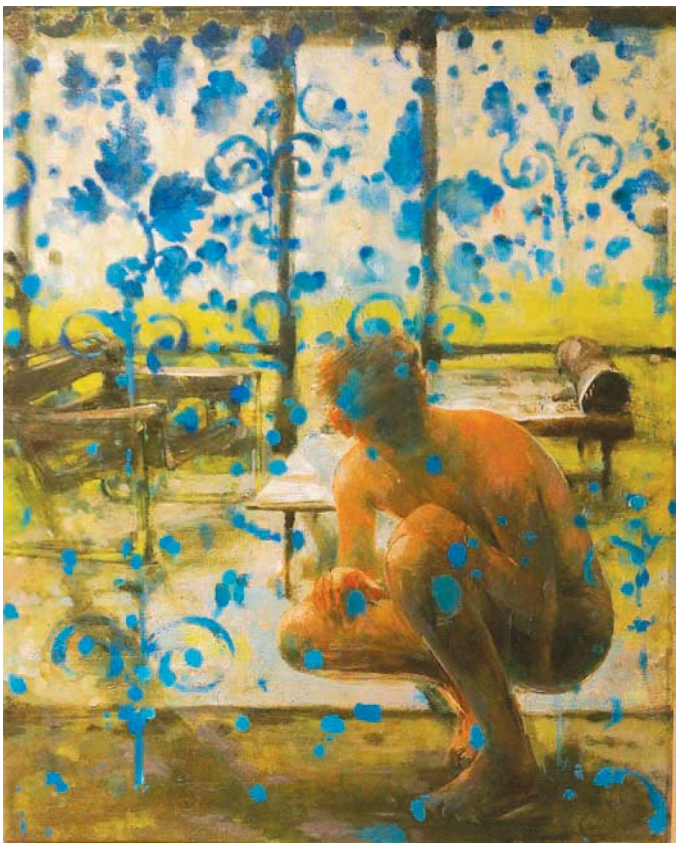
North Shore Carpet Beaters Union, gouache

LIVING ROOM
DAY 17

Whenever I approach an interior space in a painting, I like to treat it as I would a landscape. An interior space is much shallower than an exterior space, and it can be a challenge to extend the space past the confines of walls. Including doors and windows in the painting can help give the sensation of deeper space. In this painting of my living room, the real subject is the exterior light pouring into the room, bouncing off mirrors, and wrapping around the architecture and objects. I wanted the emphasis to be on how the light changed the colors of the floorboards and created interesting patterns.

EXERCISE 17

Choose a corner of your living room that would make a good subject for a painting of interior space. Look for a view that includes a window—or maybe a door that leads into a second room or an exterior space.



Moonlight Mile, oil, by William Newhouse

VARIATION

An interior space can also have a much more compressed space, and can focus on a particular detail that suggests space rather than shows a literal translation. In William's painting, he presents us with a figure, but the feature of the painting is the pattern of the wallpaper and subtle suggestions of interior space.

Mid Day, gouache

STUDIO SPACE
DAY 18

The studio is a place where I spend a lot of time and return to frequently as a subject of interior space. Throughout the twentieth century, painters from Matisse to David Hockney have been depicting their workspaces. For this painting, I wanted to reference that lineage and include my bookshelf as well as a little portrait of Picasso that hangs above my stereo.

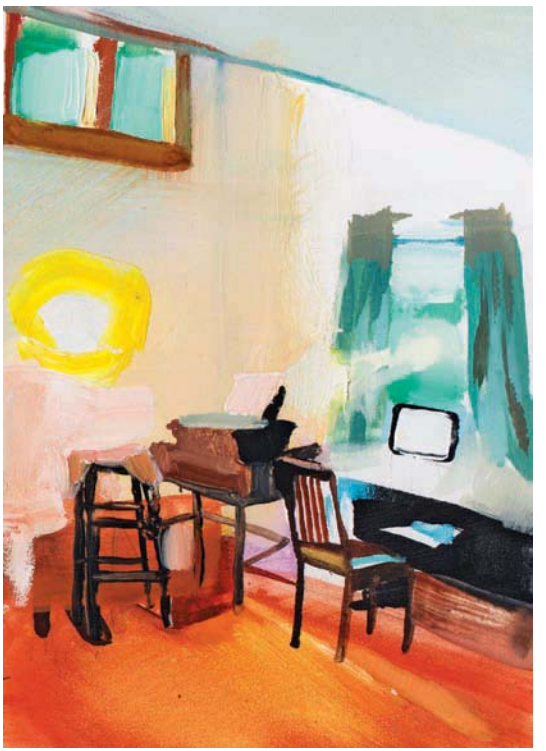
An interior space can sometimes simply be defined by the three interlocking rectangles of the corner of a room. I wanted to repeat this rectangle motif in the rest of the painting to refer back to the structure of the interior space and the rectilinear form of painting itself. For that reason, I chose to repeat a lot of rectilinear shapes throughout the space.

EXERCISE 18

Choose a view of your workspace, and look for shapes that repeat in the space. They could be the shapes of in-progress paintings or maybe even your tools.

Detail

Little Room, gouache



Studio Space, gouache and acrylic, by Cecelia Phillips

VARIATION

The studio is a sacred space for the artist, and that's probably why it's such a popular motif. In Cecelia's painting of her studio, she chose to emphasize the element of light flooding the room. Many artists choose their studios based purely on how much daylight the space receives. An interesting variation of this exercise could be to make a painting of your studio and depict how the light informs the space.

KITCHEN
DAY 19

The kitchen is my favorite space in my home. It's usually where I begin and end my day, and it is the room with the most amount of activity. I eat, cook, read, and sketch in the kitchen. It's also the space where I have a lot of conversations, whether with visitors or over the phone. I wanted to make a painting of my view from the kitchen table and give the viewer the sensation of sitting from my vantage point. When working with interior space, it's sometimes necessary to bend the rules of linear perspective to give the viewer the sense of the entire space. In order to include the kitchen table and create the depth of field I wanted, I chose to make the objects abnormally large and intensify their colors to deepen the space. Adding a small still-life element to a painting that is primarily about space is a device that will draw the viewer into the space in a much more intimate way.

EXERCISE 19

Make a painting of your kitchen or your favorite interior space in your home. Emphasize the point of view of the room and include an extreme close-up of a foreground element to intensify the depth of field.

TIP

Often interior spaces have a lot of diagonal lines and dynamic angles. Use these elements to reinforce how you want the viewer to move through the composition. For example, in my painting of my kitchen, the diagonal lines that are emphasized in the painting encourage the viewer to zigzag through the space. They eventually lead the viewer's eye to the top of the painting and into another room in the background.

Kitchen, gouache

PORCH
DAY 20

A porch or similar hybrid space straddling both interior and exterior offers countless possibilities for a landscape. The challenge here is to represent two very different types of spaces seamlessly. For this painting, I was looking from the porch through a handmade birdhouse to the landscape beyond, so essentially I was trying to capture three distinct areas of space. The subject of the painting is clearly the birdhouse, but the inclusion of the subtle details of the handrailing and post in the foreground makes the viewer aware of the vantage point and conscious of the interior-like feel of his or her own position in the scene.

EXERCISE 20

Choose a space in your home, like a porch or maybe a garage, that has both interior and exterior space. Include a foreground detail somewhere in the composition that is dramatically cropped by the edge of the painting.

Detail

TIP

When painting this space, remember to apply the rules of atmospheric perspective and use more neutral tones and muted colors in the background and through the middle ground. Increase the contrast and use more saturated colors in the foreground. This will give the illusion of a deeper space and push the foreground elements forward.

Complementary colors are a good way to create high contrast, and the neutral colors they make when mixed together will create low contrast to use in the background.

Old Maker, gouache

FJQ 9863

NEIGHBORHOOD WALK

DAY 21

When I am moving through spaces familiar or unfamiliar, I get a lot of ideas about painting. Whether I'm in the car, on my bike, or on foot, the sensation of scenes moving past me at variable speeds always inspires new painting ideas. Walking through your neighborhood is an intimate process that suggests both private and public space. For this painting, I was looking into my neighbor's backyard one day while I was out for a walk, and I was fixated on the juxtaposition of their classical female statue next to a very masculine pickup truck that hadn't been moved in quite some time. The textures of the two objects appeared connected, and yet completely different in a charming, contradictory fashion. I took a few photographs of the backyard and did a few quick thumbnail sketches in my sketchbook to use as reference when I got back to my studio later that day. The painting is a combination of the photographs, my sketches, and my memory of the scene.

EXERCISE 21

Talk a walk through your neighborhood, looking for a space other than your own that inspires you for some reason. Do a quick sketch of the space, take a few reference photos to work from, and make a painting of the space.

TIP

Whenever I leave the house, whether I'm searching for an idea for a painting or not, I always travel with a little sketchbook and a small point-and-shoot camera, both of which can fit in my pocket. You never know when something will inspire you to make a painting, so being prepared to take the proper notes and reference photographs is crucial to the process.

My Street Fighting Man, gouache

Greener Grass, acrylic and resin, by Amy Kligman

VARIATION

It's an interesting transition when we begin to travel outside the comfort of our home and studio to look for inspiration in the real world that surrounds us. It's a bit voyeuristic and scary at first. Amy addresses this emotion quite exceptionally in her painting *Greener Grass*. She presents us with a view looking right over the fence and into a completely different space. It asks the question, "Is the grass really greener?"

P

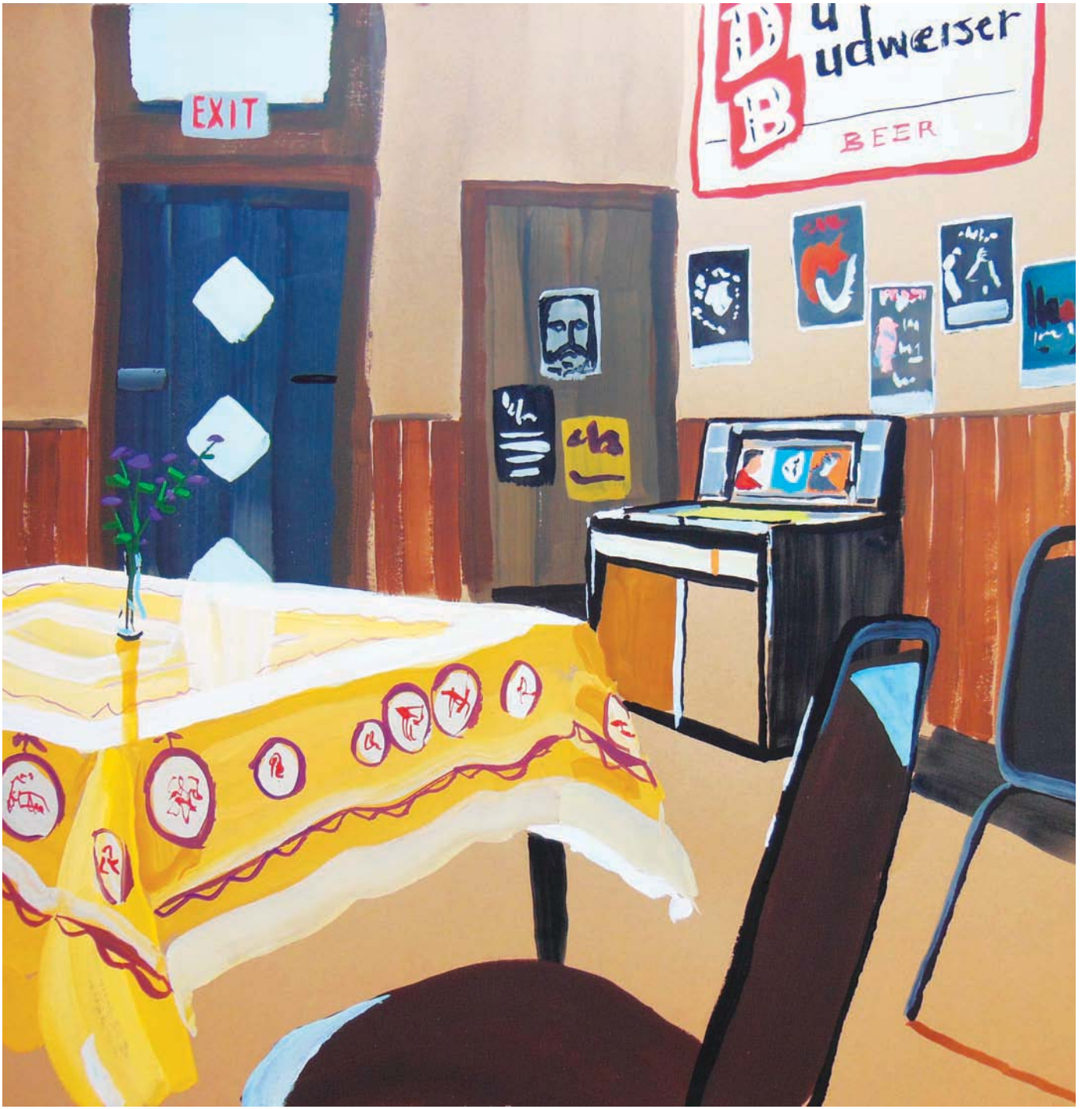
CHAPTER 5

PUBLIC PLACES

In the preceding chapter, we found that a landscape isn't limited to exterior space or sublime scenes of the horizon or trees. The landscape and places we see in a typical day of commuting through our local environment are splendid subjects for a painting. The public spaces that we frequently encounter are important to our personal narrative, and the documentation of these places—no matter how seemingly mundane—elevates their unique qualities when painted with careful observation. The public space comes with a different set of challenges than the private space of your home.

Photography, a sketchbook, memory, and invention are necessary tools. While you can certainly make these paintings from observation with a portable easel, the obstacles in some spaces, depending on their traffic, can be difficult. You may want to try working both with an easel and without. These next seven exercises are devoted to making paintings that explore public space, from the places you frequent regularly.

Danielle Steel and Her Daughter,
oil, by Libby Black


EXIT
Budweiser
BEER

CAFÉ
DAY 22

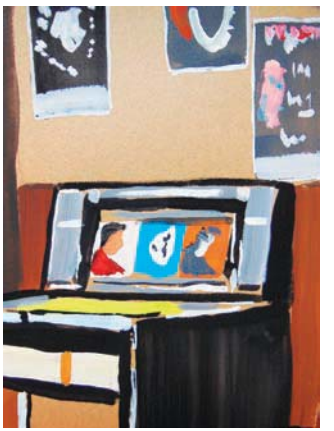
The casual setting of your favorite café or place for brunch is a good subject to begin with, especially if it's a place you go frequently. You'll be able to rely on memory a lot more than you would with a less-familiar place. There is a long tradition of artists painting the gathering places of their neighborhoods. Think of van Gogh's paintings of cafés or Edward Hopper's iconic paintings of diners. There is a certain energy in these places that continues to inspire artists.

This painting began as a drawing in my sketchbook. It's the interior of a music venue in my neighborhood that hosts a brunch on Sunday afternoons. I'm always startled by how different it looks on a sunny morning long after the bands have left town and the debris is swept from the floors. I sketched the scene, then returned and photographed the exact space from my sketch.

Whenever I have a photograph for a reference, I find it's helpful to limit myself by only using it for the first thirty minutes of the painting. At some point during the painting, abandoning the photography forces you to rely on memory and allows you to invent new moments. This makes the overall process more enjoyable and the painting more successful.

September Morning, gouache

Detail



Detail

EXERCISE 22

Go to you favorite café or coffee shop and look for a space where you have sat many times before. Begin with a few sketches of that space and take a few reference photographs as well.

TIP

If you choose to work from a photographic resource, try to limit the time you use or look at the photograph back in your studio. You will be surprised at how much you can rely simply on your memory or invention to finish the painting. Regarding this issue of invention and working from memory, sometimes it is not about what you add to the painting, but what you edit from the image. For example, in this painting, the real-life table in the foreground had a lot of clutter, but I chose to edit that out to focus on the light pouring over the table instead.

SHOP
DAY 23

One of my favorite hobbies is collecting records. Buying new and used vinyl is a routine I treat myself to every other payday. Fortunately, I live in a neighborhood where there are many independent record stores to choose from. For this painting, I chose one of my favorite record stores, located in a cozy storefront attached to a house. I wanted to capture the long row of records on the left wall and the space outside and across the street. I did a few drawings in my sketchbook and took some photographs to work from, then went back to my studio to start the painting. I wasn't concerned with the individual details of the records or posters, and many of the marks that suggest text and pictures were both invented and done from memory.

EXERCISE 23

Choose a shop in your neighborhood that you often patronize and make a painting from it. Ask the shopkeeper if it's okay to sketch and take photographs of the store to use as a reference from which to make a painting.

Detail

VARIATION

The storefront is a perfect example of how our landscape has changed dramatically over the past century. An interesting variation on this exercise could be to paint the exterior of your favorite store. In Libby's painting of a Louis Vuitton storefront, the exterior of the building fills the entire canvas, denying us any sense of atmosphere or horizon.

Pay Day, gouache

Louis Vuitton Store, oil, by Libby Black

NIGHT PAINTING

DAY 24

Night paintings are an exciting variation on the landscape. Night space is much flatter than day space but can create interesting moments for abstraction, especially in an urban environment with a lot of artificial light. When I deal with the subject of nighttime, I like to use a black ground. For this painting, I was looking at the gas station around the corner from my house. I was especially interested in emphasizing the weeds in the foreground interrupting the artificial glow of the lights. The gas station is an iconic subject in American landscape painting; it's a place that suggests movement and transit.

At night the stillness and illumination of this ubiquitous structure can be very dramatic and poetic.

EXERCISE 24

Choose a structure or place that is illuminated by artificial light to make a night painting. Work on a black piece of paper or canvas, or simply paint your ground with a dark color.

TIP

Working on a black piece of paper can be challenging, like the reverse challenges of watercolor painting where the white ground is your source of light. When you're working on a black ground, you're adding the light and allowing the dark areas to remain untouched. Make sure to do the necessary preparatory drawing so that you know where, exactly, you're adding the color and light.

Black Gold, gouache

SUNOCO

Early Spring, gouache

HAPPY HOUR
DAY 25

Using a black ground for an interior space can also be an effective way to deal with how light informs a space. We usually think of bars and taverns as being dark places that are dimly lit, but there is something really beautiful about how the last hours of daylight pour into a window of a dark bar and increase the contrast and color of the space and objects. For this painting, I was sitting at the bar in one of my favorite taverns and looking directly out the front window—observing the light cascading across the floor, stools, and bar. I took a few reference photographs and did a very detailed drawing of the space while I finished my beer before I returned to the studio to finish the painting. The light made for a lot of interesting shapes and colors as it bounced off mirrors and different-colored glass.

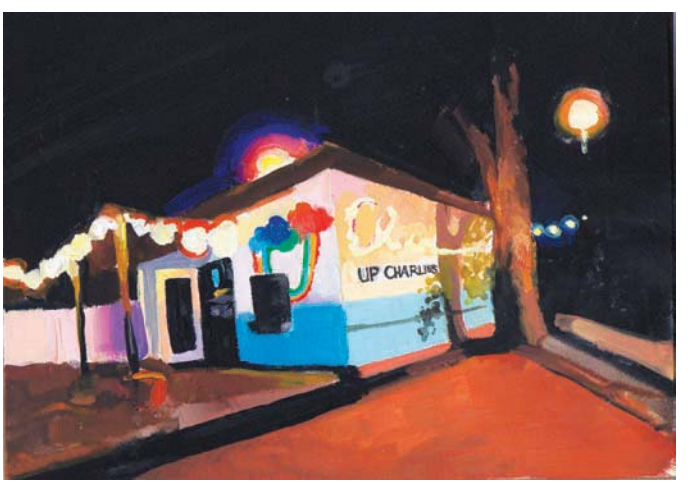
The hours between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., "happy hour," are a great time to explore light and space in a public place. There is a sense of the day coming to a close and the anticipation of night beginning that can be sensed and translated into a picture.

EXERCISE 25

Go to your favorite tavern or bar or some other transitional gathering place where the light pouring through the window is a character in the space. Make a painting that sums up this part of the day.

VARIATION

Artificial light—like the neon signs typically seen in bars—is a great painting subject. It's challenging to create that glow and depict how it interacts with the space of night. In Cecelia's painting of a bar in Texas, she expertly depicts this with a very loose and painterly mark and by allowing the colors to bleed into one another while they are wet—a technique you can achieve if you work quickly.



Cheer Up Charlie's, Austin, Texas, gouache and acrylic, by Cecelia Phillips

BARBERSHOP
DAY 26

The window is an important motif in my paintings about public places. I have always enjoyed the compression of interior and exterior space that you get when you suggest the structure of the window in the composition. This type of composition presents a lot of opportunities for playing with depth of field based on how you use contrast and value. For this painting, I was sitting in my local barbershop waiting to get my hair cut and sketching the street and the windowsill. After my haircut, I took a few reference photographs and returned to my studio to make a painting. I chose to work on a background for this painting that emphasized the interior/exterior aspect of the composition and increased the richness of the wood paneling.

The barbershop or hair salon is another classic American subject. There is a communal spirit to these utilitarian public places that suggests new beginnings and is very universal.

EXERCISE 26

The next time you're waiting to get your hair cut, bring your sketchbook and camera. Make some drawings and notations of an interesting view of the interior space, and use them to make a painting.

TIP

When dealing with space in your paintings—especially interior space or forms that are man-made, like architecture—it's helpful to think about the direction of your brushstroke. Rather than filling in the space arbitrarily, push or pull the paint in the most logical direction the space is moving. For example, in my painting of the barbershop, the brushstrokes used to render the wood paneling are vertical, but when I'm describing the plane underneath the window, I use a diagonal brushstroke that corresponds with the linear perspective of the space.

Willy's, gouache

DINER
DAY 27

One of my earliest memories as a young artist was discovering the work of Edward Hopper and, more specifically, seeing *Nighthawks* for the first time. Since then, the diner has been a subject I have returned to frequently over the years. Like your local tavern, café, or barbershop, the diner is an iconic and universal public place that has so much potential for various compositions to describe its particulars. For this painting, I was sitting at the counter of a roadside diner just outside my hometown. I wanted to incorporate a small still-life motif that would emphasize the depth of field of the counter and lead the viewer to the exterior space and horizon.

EXERCISE 27

Go to your favorite diner and take a sketchbook and camera with you. Look for unique details in the diner or find a view that incorporates both the interior and exterior space.

Detail

TIP

When considering all the different types of surfaces and textures in a particular space, vary the amount of paint you use to render different types of surfaces. In my painting of the diner, I used very transparent washes to articulate the light across the counter. I chose to use thicker paint to render objects like the ketchup and mustard bottles because they have a different surface.

Catsup, gouache

CHAPTER 7

NEW DIRECTIONS

The genre of portrait painting has many different avenues and themes to explore beyond the tradition of an observed painting of a seated subject. The presence of portraiture in contemporary art continues to be relevant, constantly redefining itself.

A portrait combines still life and landscape with the human element—a figure in space interacting with objects. A portrait can also tell stories through gesture and environment as well as light and color. A portrait's subject is usually a person, but it could be an animal that has "personality" or even a group of objects that embody a person.

One of the most exciting things about painting is that there is no limit to what you can create on a canvas. If you're painting a portrait, you can push boundaries by inventing narratives about your subjects. In this final chapter, we combine the format of portraiture with all the experiences from the previous exercises to make imaginative paintings about the human element.

Brooke Shields in Burberry,
oil, by Libby Black

HISTORICAL PORTRAIT

DAY 36

Painting has a long tradition of homage and studying the masters' works. Most painters at some point in their formal training have copied the work of a master or painted homage to an artist they admire. I have always admired Édouard Vuillard and frequently return to him for inspiration. His portrait of Lunge-Poe, one of his closest friends, is one of my favorite works of his.

Vuillard's approach to brushwork made a significant impact on me as a young artist. For this painting, I wanted to copy the mark making as accurately as I could. The only thing I consciously changed in the homage is the background. I have always loved how Vuillard handles negative space and pattern, so I included a bit of that in the reds and browns in the background to activate the red linear marks in the figure.

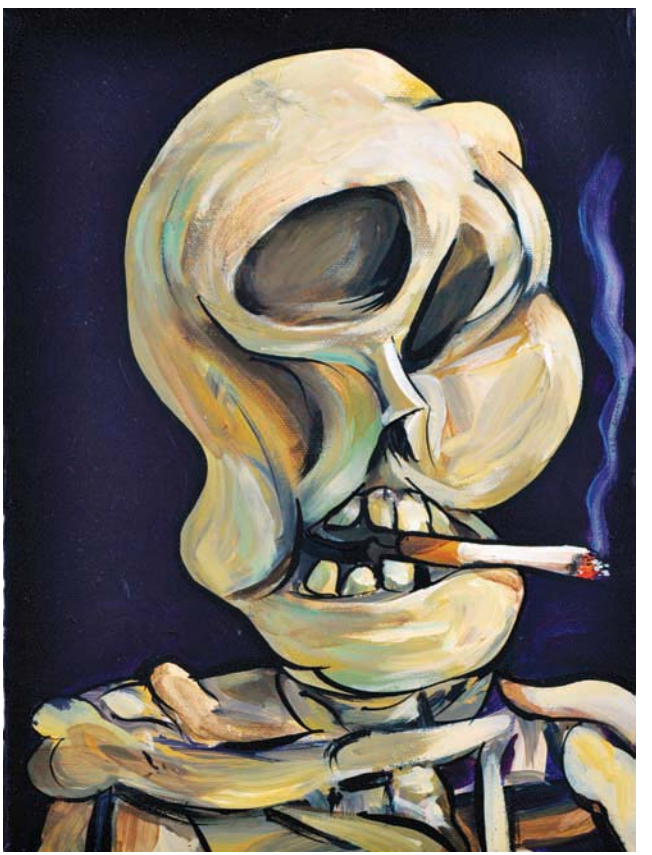
VARIATION

Another way to approach this subject is to choose a portrait you have always admired and use only the subject and composition as a source to remake the painting in your own style. In Harris's painting of van Gogh's *Head of a skeleton with a burning cigarette,* the iconic image is instantly recognizable, but it is executed in the artist's own style and approach to brushwork and color. This adds another level of humor to the already funny and macabre little painting.

Vuillard study, gouache

EXERCISE 36

Choose one of your favorite portraits to re-create and do a little research about the subject for inspiration. You can paint it in your own style or try to copy the artist's style.



Smoking (After Van Gogh), acrylic, by Harris Johnson

CELEBRITY PORTRAIT
DAY 37

The celebrity portrait is a motif that is as old as painting itself and continues to be relevant in contemporary painting. For better or worse, the idea of celebrity is ubiquitous in our culture, taking a lot of effort to ignore. Many artists continue to respond to it.

The idea of "local celebrity" is an especially fun one to play around with; typically they're figures that everyone in your town recognizes but do not garner much attention outside the city limits. For this painting, I set out to make a portrait of one of Cleveland's local weathermen, Dick Goddard. He's a curious and funny figure who has been on the air longer than most of us can remember. I found a picture of him on the Internet that I decided to work from because it seemed to be a little more candid than most. My painting focused primarily on his intense gaze, emphasizing the redness of his eyes.

EXERCISE 37

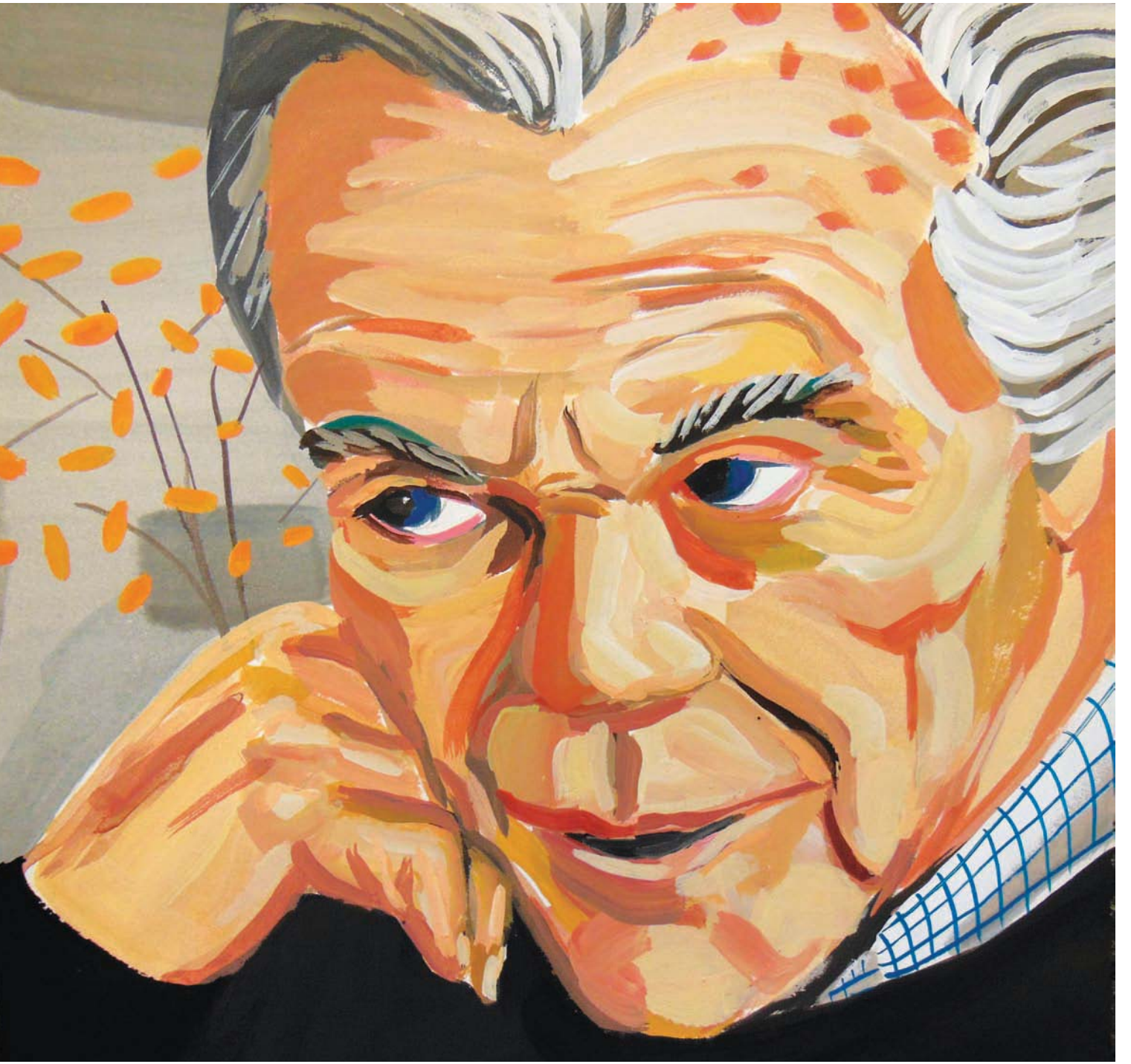
Choose a celebrity that you find fascinating to depict in a portrait. Look for a photograph or two to work from that you think best capture that celebrity's personality.

Dakota Fanning, oil, by Libby Black

VARIATION

Fashion advertising, especially the high-end sort that attempts to humanize celebrities, is great as a source for candid celebrity photographs. In Libby's painting of Dakota Fanning, she used a Marc Jacobs ad that depicts the star in a more casual composition than you would find in a "head shot" of the actress.

Dick, gouache



STRANGER PORTRAIT

DAY 38

Living as we do in the digital age, the number of images we see on a daily basis can sometimes be overwhelming. On television, the Internet, and smartphones, we see hundreds of pictures a day. Chances are good that at least half of those images include faces of people who are complete strangers to us.

It can be fun to create a portrait of a stranger, using the countless images that you come across in a single day. I found an image of this woman in a discarded family photo album and was immediately drawn to her face and expression. Who is she? What did she do? Is she still alive? You can attempt to answer all these questions by simply re-creating the portrait in paint. I applied many of the techniques from previous exercises on working with a photograph, using the image only as a starting point, then allowing my imagination to fill in a lot of the details concerning color, light, and pattern.

EXERCISE 38

Find a picture of a person who is a complete stranger to you. Allow your imagination to take over at some point during the process and abandon the photograph. Finish the painting with your own decisions about details like clothing and maybe background, based on a narrative you have invented.

Boy with Hat, oil, by Libby Black

VARIATION

When you're working from a photograph of an unfamiliar subject, some elements from the photograph will be lost in translation and new ones will be added. A significant shift in scale from the source to the painting will intensify this. In Libby's portrait *Boy with Hat,* the painting is significantly bigger than the photographic source, which allows her to exploit the tension in the image and make decisions on color and form that are completely imagined.

Still Searchin', gouache

PET PORTRAIT
DAY 39

If you're a pet owner, your pet is probably just like another member of the family—and has just as many portraits in the family photo album as any human family member. The sentimental connection and the animal form make pets great subjects to paint.

For this painting, I wanted to make a portrait of my cat in her favorite spot on the kitchen table next to the window. I started with a few drawings in my sketchbook, and then took some reference photographs to work from as well. More than likely, you will have to use some photographic references to make a portrait of your pet. In addition, it may be helpful to do some quick sketches of your pet from life to better understand the anatomy of the particular animal you choose. The nice thing about using cats and dogs for subjects is that they tend to take a lot of naps, which is a perfect time to do drawings and make studies.

EXERCISE 39

Make a portrait of your pet. If you don't have one, borrow someone else's pet to work with. As an alternative, you could treat this exercise like a commission and collaborate with the pet's owner.

Weiner Dog, watercolor, by Cecelia Phillips

VARIATION

An interesting variation on this exercise is to change the format of your canvas to complement the type of animal you paint. Typically, a portrait format is a vertical rectangle, but in Cecelia's portrait of a Dachshund, she presents the image of the dog on an elongated horizontal canvas to emphasize the dog's most recognizable characteristic.

Hildy, gouache

POSSESSION PORTRAIT

DAY 40

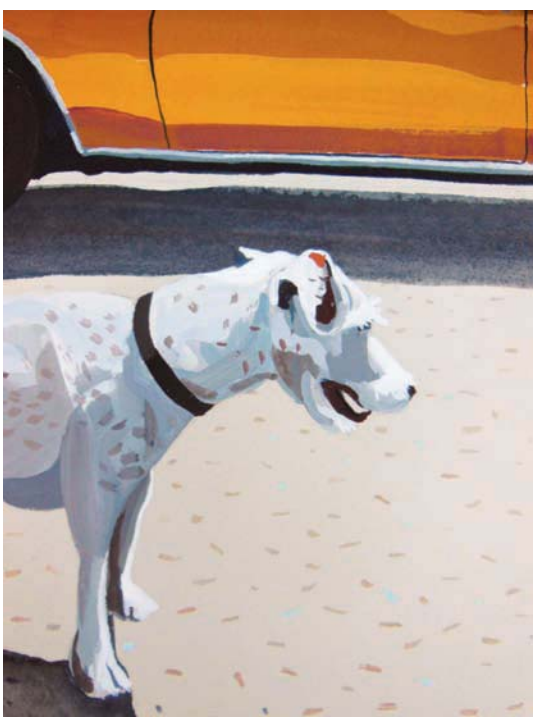
The things we own and are most proud of are representations of our personal taste and style. They are great subjects for a painting because they tell stories of our desires and our history. Just as we sometimes choose pets that reflect our personalities, the possessions that we are most proud of are typically those that mirror our personalities.

For this painting, I made a "portrait" of a friend's classic muscle car, a possession that was passed down to him and that he is extremely proud of. People often identify with cars because cars have many relationships to the human body in form and personality. The painting also works as a double portrait with the inclusion of the dog in the foreground, a detail I added last, mostly as a compositional element. Rather than choose a vertical format, I wanted to portray the elegant profile of the car, so I gave the painting a more horizontal landscape format. Including the dog at the bottom of the composition slightly overlapping the car reinforces the vertical read of the painting.

East Side, gouache

EXERCISE 40

For this painting, choose a favorite possession that you identify with and that has anthropomorphic qualities. Begin in the sketchbook doing a few different variations on composition; think about the differences between still life and portraiture in regard to orientation, vertical versus horizontal, and cropping the image.



Detail

NARRATIVE PORTRAIT

DAY 41

A portrait has the ability to tell a story about a person. An interesting way to approach this is to come up with the story first and then build a painting around that narrative. It's almost like working in the reverse order of the portrait of a stranger. Rather than responding to a stranger's face and inventing a story to assist in filling in the details, come up with a story first and then find a subject who would best describe this portrait. I was people watching and eavesdropping on patrons in a local tavern one day and started thinking about a narrative of the quiet reflection at the end of a workday. A narrative portrait demands that you pay more attention to the details of the space and objects that the figure is interacting with. It's a fun exercise that allows you to work more like a film director. Choosing the elements of location, model, objects, and lighting that will help tell the story are all important details that should be carefully considered.

EXERCISE 41

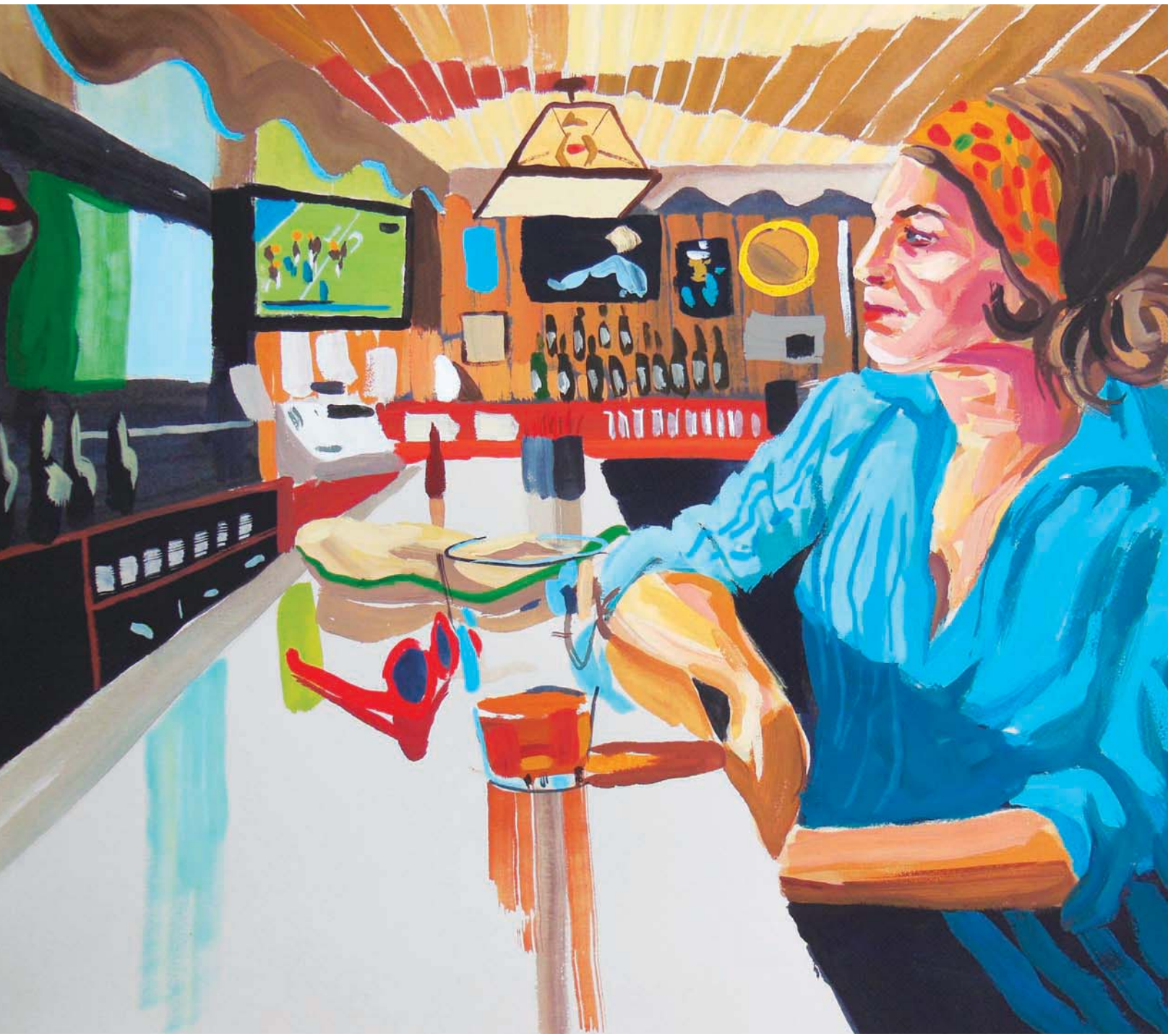
Invent a protagonist and a micro-narrative about him or her that tells a story, and then work from that story. It could be as simple as something like "A guy walks into a bar and . . ." Begin with your sketchbook and camera, working out a few variations—almost like a storyboard. Choose a photograph to set up as a subject and a composition to use for this painting.

Steering a Sinking Ship, oil, by William Newhouse

VARIATION

You can let your imagination run wild with this exercise. Make it as fantastical as you like. In William's painting, the figuration comes first and then he makes decisions about space that fit the gesture of the figures to support the narrative elements. The flooded bathroom suggests a whimsical tale of steering troubled waters.

Off the Clock, gouache



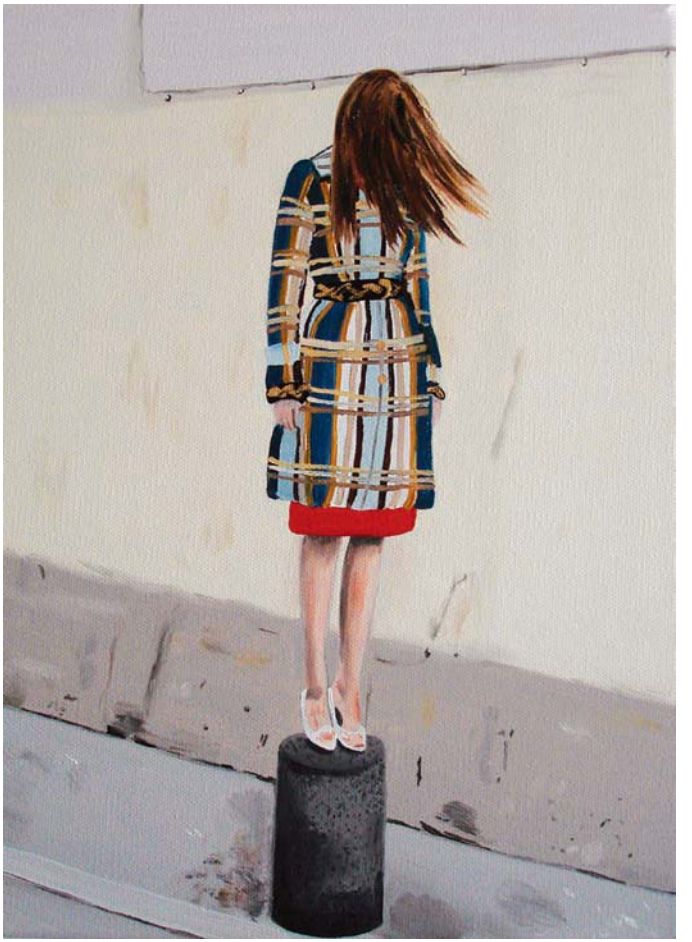
HIDDEN PORTRAIT

DAY 42

When someone simply mentions the word *portrait*, chances are the first thing that comes to mind is an image of a face. Likeness is typically credited to a person's facial features, especially his or her eyes. What happens when we eliminate the face altogether to make a portrait? For this painting, I wanted to challenge myself and try to create a portrait where the face was completely absent. Much like in the narrative portrait, the concept for this painting was conceived before I had a subject to photograph. I wanted the identifiable gesture of shaking the rug to be the subject of the portrait. After taking a few reference photos of the gesture, I had enough sources to piece together the painting. Only a few details refer to the person's identity: The figure's legs and high heels clearly indicate that this is a female. The rug itself and the obscured car just behind the woman are details that refer to elements of class, style, and even the urban environment that suggest the subject of this portrait.

EXERCISE 42

For this last painting, create a portrait without depicting the face. There are so many possibilities for this challenge. Start in your sketchbook and draw a few different concepts before deciding on a subject to photograph.



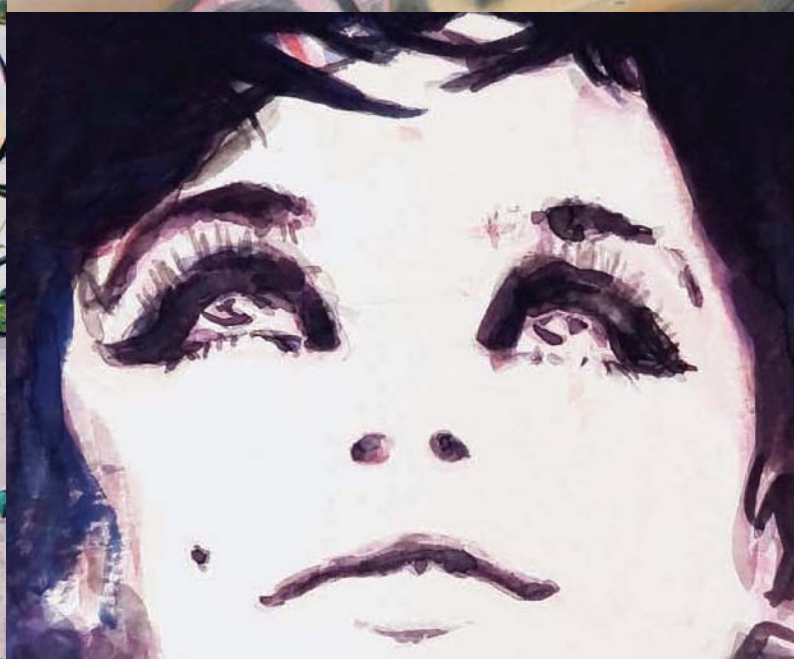
Standing on the Edge, oil, by Libby Black

VARIATION

You certainly don't have to hide an object or obscure the face for this portrait. How you pose your subject or the way in which the subject gestures could add an intriguing element to this theme. In Libby's painting, the hair of the girl she portrays does this quite elegantly.

Carpet Beater, gouache

PRECIOUS



CHAPTER 8

CONTRIBUTORS

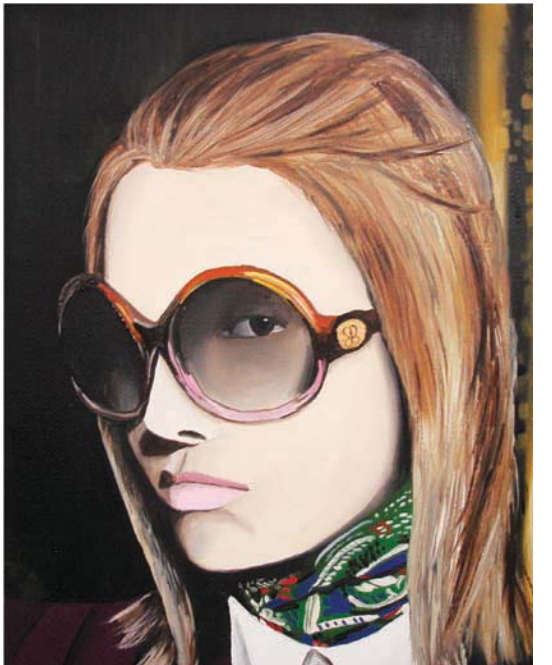
LIBBY BLACK

Libby Black is a painter and sculptural installation artist living in San Francisco. She has exhibited at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Orange County Museum of Art, Jersey City Museum, and numerous galleries in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. She has been an artist in residence at Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito, and Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, California. Her work has been reviewed in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, *Zink magazine*, *Flash Art*, and the *New York Times*. She is represented by Marx and Zavattero in San Francisco. She earned a BFA at The Cleveland Institute of Art and an MFA at California College of the Arts. You can see more of her work at www.libbyblack.com.

Miu Miu Underwear

Protest

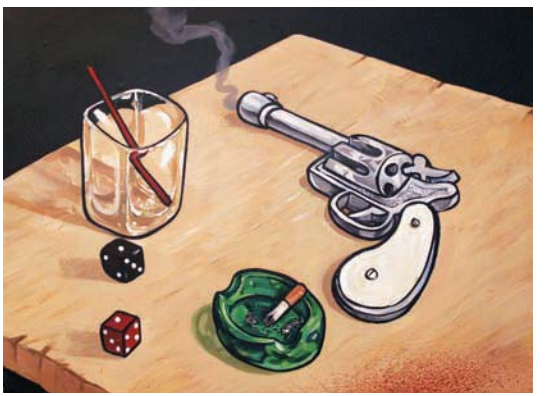
Balenciaga



HARRIS JOHNSON

Harris Johnson was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1986. He graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Art with a BFA in painting in 2009 and a certificate from The Burren College of Art in Ballyvaughan, Ireland. He has exhibited his work in Cleveland as well as internationally in Ireland. His works have also been featured in online exhibitions, and are held in numerous private collections. He lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. You can see more of his work at www.freeharrisjohnson.com.

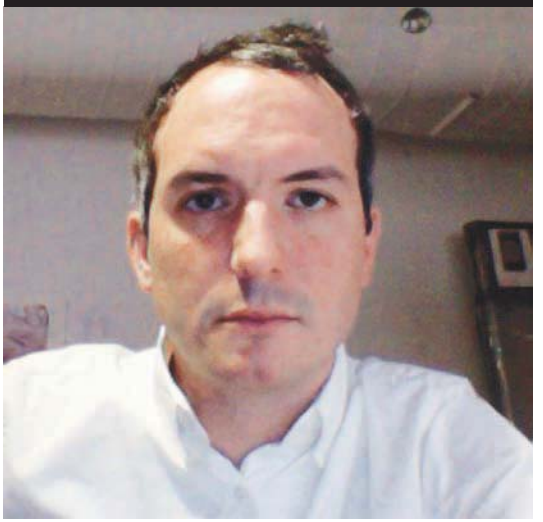
Parking Lot Sculpture



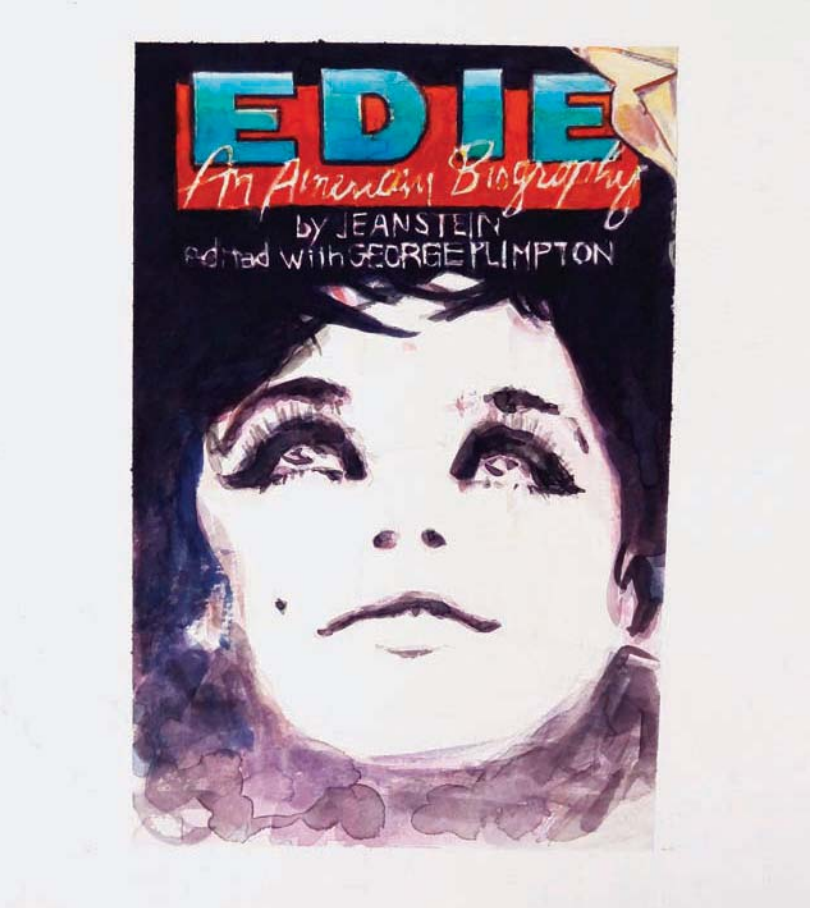
Gun on Table (Roulette)

Painter's Hand (After Pete Claesz)

MATTHEW JOHNSON



Matthew Johnson is a painter who lives and works in New York City. Originally from Memphis, Tennessee, he graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Art in 1998. He has exhibited his work in Memphis, Cleveland, and New York City. His art is usually formal, but the result, or at least the aim, is to arrive at something "other." Strange relationships, weird montages, happenstance, and precariousness are privileged characters within the work composed of shape, color, and line. All are compiled and composed within the picture plane in hopes of achieving the desired goal of finding function in the offbeat. You can see more of his work at www.matthewjohnsonart.com.



Edie

Inches Off

Postcard

AMY KLIGMAN

Amy Kligman is a painter living in Kansas City, Missouri. She exhibits her work nationally in group and solo exhibitions, and has been featured in many print and online publications, including *New American Paintings*, *Design for Mankind*, and *Booooooom!* She also codirects Plug Projects, an artist-run exhibition space. You can see more of her work at www.amykligman.com.

Precious

Pillow Talk

Unbirthday

WILLIAM NEWHOUSE

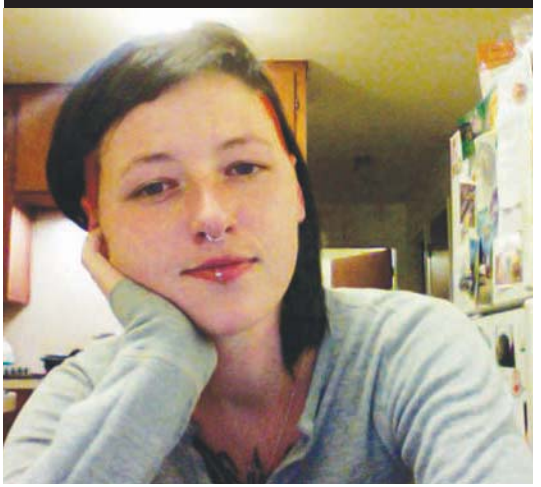
William Newhouse is a painter and designer who lives and works in Chicago. Born in Wisconsin, he studied painting at The Cleveland Institute of Art and in Newcastle upon Tyne, England. He has exhibited his work in Portland, Oregon; Chicago; and Cleveland. You can see more of his work at www.williamnewhouse.net.

Sound of Constant Fog

The Meeting Place

Safe Passage

CECELIA PHILLIPS



Cecelia Phillips was born and raised in Rochester, New York. She graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Art in 2005, then moved to Austin, Texas, where she currently resides. She has shown her work in Texas as well as nationally, and is represented by William Busta Gallery in Cleveland. She paints and collects rocks, minerals, and cats, and spends her free time hiking the outdoors. You can see more of her work at www.celiaphillips.com.

Untitled

Lost

Satellite

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
TIMOTHY CALLAGHAN

Timothy Callaghan is a painter who lives and works in Cleveland. Born in Toledo, Ohio, he relocated to study painting at the Cleveland Institute of Art. He received an MFA from Kent State University. He has exhibited his work in New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Cleveland. His paintings are in various public and private collections, including The Cleveland Clinic. Aside from painting and writing, he also teaches art at Cuyahoga Community College and has been a visiting artist and lecturer at The Cleveland Institute of Art, Oberlin College, and Savannah College of Art and Design. He is represented by the William Busta Gallery in Cleveland. You can see more of his work at www.timothycallaghan.com.

The Restless Lovers' Garden

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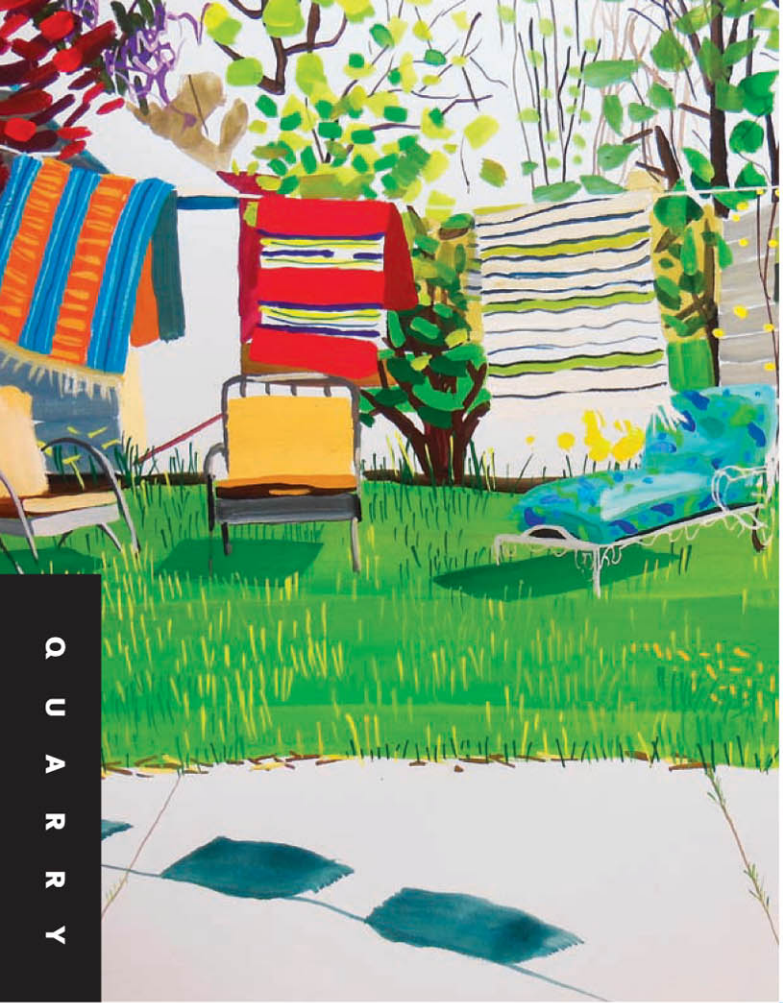

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One Painting a Day offers you a fresh and fun 6-week course that explores the timeless traditions of observational painting through daily experiences and routine.

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You will find suggestions on technique, approach, and materials for each day, while the "weekly lessons" will explore a format or a rhythm for creating content, inspiring you to make the ordinary extraordinary as you paint from everyday life.

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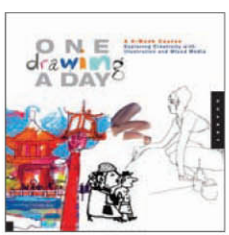

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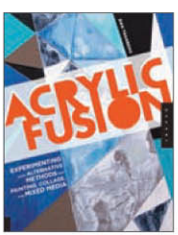

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